

**Jimmy Kleto and Louisa Kleto
Central Coffee
Charlotte, North Carolina**

Date: March 11, 2017
Location: Central Coffee, Charlotte, North Carolina
Interviewer: Victoria Bouloubasis
Transcription: Technitype Transcription
Length: Thirty-six minutes
Project: Charlotte's Central Avenue Corridor

Victoria Bouloubasis: It is March 11th, 2017, and I am in Charlotte, North Carolina, with Jimmy and Louisa Kleto, the owners of Central Coffee. Jimmy, can you start by telling me where were you born and raised?

[00:00:26]

Jimmy Kleto: Born and raised here in Charlotte.

[00:00:29]

Victoria Bouloubasis: And can you tell me a little bit about where your family's from and how they got here?

[00:00:35]

Jimmy Kleto: Our family is my grandparents came over from Greece. My yiayia's side from Agrinio and father's side from Karpenisi, and they came to Charlotte in the fifties and started the family, and so we're second generation. My parents were born here in Charlotte.

[00:01:00]

Victoria Bouloubasis: And this is the Kleto side?

[00:01:04]

Jimmy Kleto: This would have been the Polizos.

[00:01:13]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Okay. And what did they do here when they came here?

[00:01:15]

Jimmy Kleto: My papou who I'm named after, owned businesses, and the last thing, from what I remember as a small child, owned a diner in downtown Charlotte called the D&P [phonetic], which were his initials. It was just a family diner cafe in downtown Charlotte. I think it was right next to where Discovery Place is. And so I have memories of going there and helping my mom when she was, you know, serving and ringing up customers and stuff, and I was just running around the booths and stuff. It was some of my earliest memories.

[00:02:02]

Louisa Kleto: I didn't know your mom was a server. [*Laughs*]

[00:02:04]

Jimmy Kleto: Mm-hmm.

[00:02:06]

Louisa Kleto: What was the pool hall thing?

[00:02:08]

Jimmy Kleto: The pool hall was my dad's father.

[00:02:12]

Louisa Kleto: I don't know.

[00:02:13]

Jimmy Kleto: The Rex was a pool hall in downtown Charlotte.

[00:02:15]

Victoria Bouloubasis: When was that one opened?

[00:02:18]

Jimmy Kleto: I am not sure. I think it was already—had long been closed before even my oldest brother was born.

[00:02:30]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Did you work in any of the family businesses or restaurants growing up?

[00:02:35]

Jimmy Kleto: No, no, I didn't. I just remember getting dragged to the D&P by my mom on days that she had to go help out or something.

[00:02:44]

Victoria Bouloubasis: What was your plan? Like what did you want to do growing up?

[00:02:48]

Jimmy Kleto: Oh, wow. I think there's a very early audiotape where my brother, my older brother, my older sister, and I are just talking on it, and I think I said I wanted to be an auto mechanic. And, of course, I was probably like four, three or four years old at the time. But then once I turned fifteen, I started working in restaurants, Chick-fil-A to be exact, and had pretty much been working in food.

[00:03:12]

Victoria Bouloubasis: So your first job was at Chick-fil-A?

[00:03:16]

Jimmy Kleto: Yes, here in Charlotte.

[00:03:18]

Victoria Bouloubasis: And then you said you worked other food service jobs?

[00:03:20]

Jimmy Kleto: Yes. From Chick-fil-A, I did work at a Showmars which was managed by my godfather at the time, Jimmy Pappas, and I think I did that through high school, and then when I was in college, I worked at Cici's Pizza. I did work at a Greek restaurant while living in Boone. I lived in Boone for about seven years and worked at a Greek

restaurant called Mr. Original Gyros for about two years, I believe, and then back down to Charlotte for the coffee shop.

[00:04:01]

Victoria Bouloubasis: So growing up in Charlotte, because a lot of folks, Greek folks, own restaurants, was that something you heard a lot?

[00:04:13]

Jimmy Kleto: Oh, yeah.

[00:04:13]

Victoria Bouloubasis: And was that something you tried to get away from? Or explain kind of growing up Greek in Charlotte. [*Laughs*]

[00:04:17]

Jimmy Kleto: I wouldn't say get away from. It was just a known thing that Greeks owned restaurants.

[00:04:24]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Common knowledge or something?

[00:04:25]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, yeah, it really was.

[00:04:27]

Louisa Kleto: To you guys.

[00:04:28]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah.

[00:04:30]

Louisa Kleto: To us outsiders.

[00:04:31]

Jimmy Kleto: But growing up, because, like, my parents worked in the school system. Like, my mother before we were born, she taught blind children and special needs. And my father, before we were born, was a middle school science teacher, and then he was in administration. So, you know, growing up within the Greek church, like with Sunday School and the kids and G.O.Y.A. and stuff, like hanging out with friends, and their parents were the restaurant people, and it was like my parents were schoolteachers and stuff. So that was a little bit different, but it was just known that—

[00:05:04]

Louisa Kleto: You were the weird kid.

[00:05:05]

Jimmy Kleto: I was the different one. I was the different Greek. [*Laughs*]

[00:05:09]

Victoria Bouloubasis: That’s real. I can understand that, too, because, yeah. So then I guess I want to know a little bit about the timeline, like how or when y’all met, and then did the coffee shop happen together or [*inaudible*]?

[00:05:24]

Louisa Kleto: Our story of meeting is very odd, I think.

[00:05:30]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah.

[00:05:30]

Louisa Kleto: Everybody is like, “Are you serious? Is that real?”

And we’re like, “Yeah, definitely.”

I was living in Fort Mill, South Carolina, with my sister, who had just had twin boys, and so I was going to stay with her for about six months and help her with the kids, because twins are hectic. I mean, we have a five-month-old now, almost six-month-old now, and I just can’t even imagine having two of them at the same time. So I was working at The Blake Hotel uptown in Charlotte, and I would drive back and forth. And Jimmy was working at the Dilworth Coffee in Quail Corners—

[00:06:02]

Jimmy Kleto: South Charlotte.

[00:06:03]

Louisa Kleto: —which is South Charlotte, which is right by where your mom’s house is.

[00:06:07]

Victoria Bouloubasis: What is that?

[00:06:08]

Louisa Kleto: It’s a coffee shop.

[00:06:09]

Jimmy Kleto: It was a coffee shop.

[00:06:10]

Louisa Kleto: Dilworth Coffee House, right?

[00:06:11]

Jimmy Kleto: Mm-hmm.

[00:06:12]

Louisa Kleto: So there was one by my house, my sister’s house, but it was—I don’t know, they were like kind of boring, so we would go—I would just drive up to the one that Jimmy worked at because they were more fun, and Pete was the owner. He was

actually in our wedding. And everybody there was just so much more entertaining. So I would stop there on my way to work, on my way from work, and just if I, like, was bored. And Jimmy was there, and I guess I am oblivious, because I did not realize that he would, like, try to flirt with me or something, and I would—

[00:06:48]

Jimmy Kleto: I was. I would purposely, like, walk through the dining room and wipe down tables beside her, just to like try to engage her, and she was just totally zoned in on her book or her computer or whatever. And I finally mustered up the courage to, like, ask her out, and with the worst timing possible, because she says, “I’m moving back to Pittsburgh next week.”

And I was like, “Cool.”

So I got her number anyways, and I think it was a month later she came back down for her nephews’ baptism, and she came by the shop to visit me. And at this point, I was under construction with Central Coffee. So that was under construction. I was still working just some part-time shifts at the Dilworth Coffee Shop, just to keep some cash in my pocket and—

[00:07:35]

Louisa Kleto: And to learn more about [*inaudible*].

[00:07:37]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, and Pete, the owner there, was teaching me a lot about how to run and own a coffee shop and stuff like that, which was awesome. And so at that time, she was getting ready to go back to Pittsburgh, I got her phone number.

[00:07:53]

Louisa Kleto: No, you didn't.

[00:07:55]

Jimmy Kleto: Yes, you're right. It ended up being her mother's phone number.

[00:07:57]

Louisa Kleto: My mother's phone number.

[00:07:59]

Jimmy Kleto: And I texted and said something along the lines of like, "It was really great to see you. Hope you had a safe trip back up," something, something else.

And get a response that says, "Hi, this is Louisa's mother. This is her phone number."

I was like, "Oh, jeez." Well, at least I didn't say anything [*inaudible*].

[00:08:15]

Louisa Kleto: We were also just like so awkward.

[00:08:17]

Jimmy Kleto: We were.

[00:08:19]

Louisa Kleto: It was—we were—it was terrible. He was—like we were saying goodbye, and literally like it was just so uncomfortable and everything.

[00:08:28]

Jimmy Kleto: It was a train wreck.

[00:08:29]

Louisa Kleto: And he put his hands down on the counter, like face up, palm up, and was just like, “Okay, well, I’ll talk to you later.”

[00:08:35]

Jimmy Kleto: I wanted to hold her hands.

[00:08:36]

Louisa Kleto: And Pete, on the other side of the counter, was literally with another employee, and he goes, “Watch for the train wreck.”

And I go, “Uh, okay, bye,” and like give him low-fives and, like, walk out the door.

And he goes, “And there it is.” And I felt like an idiot. Like, I feel like I’m blushing right now. Like, it was horrible. And I walked out of there and I was like, “I don’t know what just happened. I think I messed up.” But then—

[00:09:02]

Jimmy Kleto: But the very—

[00:09:03]

Louisa Kleto: —my mom was like, “Uh, this boy is texting is me.”

[00:09:05]

Jimmy Kleto: But the very next night, I called her, and we had like a three-and-a-half-hour conversation and started dating long distance, and we did for a long—for several months, took a break, but always kept—

[00:09:19]

Louisa Kleto: *[Inaudible]*.

[00:09:20]

Jimmy Kleto: But always kept in contact and always were in contact with each other. And then in 2010?

[00:09:28]

Louisa Kleto: Ten.

[00:09:30]

Jimmy Kleto: 2010, we officially kind of got back together, still long distance.

[00:09:35]

Louisa Kleto: I was living in Boston at this point.

[00:09:37]

Jimmy Kleto: She was going to—

[00:09:37]

Louisa Kleto: I was running a—managing a coffee shop in Cambridge, and I had signed on for like two years, and we had just gotten back together. And he was like, “I’ve waited this long for you, I can wait a little bit longer.”

And I was like, “Okay.” [*Laughs*]

[00:09:51]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah.

[00:09:53]

Louisa Kleto: And then we got engaged.

[00:09:55]

Jimmy Kleto: While she was still living in Boston. She came down. It was our three-year anniversary, and we got engaged here in Charlotte.

[00:10:01]

Louisa Kleto: Three years, yeah. [*Laughs*]

[00:10:02]

Jimmy Kleto: Then after her two-year commitment there, she moved down here to Charlotte and then—

[00:10:07]

Louisa Kleto: Like six months later, yeah.

[00:10:09]

Jimmy Kleto: Six months later, we got married, and that's that. And at that point, the coffee shop was already open, because we opened that in 2009.

[00:10:16]

Victoria Bouloubasis: And when did y'all get married?

[00:10:18]

Louisa Kleto: In 2012.

[00:10:19]

Jimmy Kleto: 2012.

[00:10:20]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Wow. How old are y'all now?

[00:10:22]

Louisa Kleto: I'm thirty-one. He'll be thirty-five.

[00:10:25]

Jimmy Kleto: I'll be thirty-five on Tuesday, actually.

[00:10:27]

Victoria Bouloubasis: And so y'all met when you were still in your twenties.

[00:10:30]

Louisa Kleto: I was twenty—we got married when I was twenty-six, so I was like twenty-two.

[00:10:34]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, in our twenties, for sure.

[00:10:37]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Well, that's really sweet.

[00:10:40]

Jimmy Kleto: It's such a funny story.

[00:10:42]

Louisa Kleto: It turned out to be such a cute story, but it was super awkward at the time.

[laughter] Yeah. We're like, "I can't believe that just happened." But, yeah, and then I moved down here. I got a job working at [*inaudible*] and then I was just kind of working at the coffee shop while they were still getting open, and then I worked there for a little while and had a manager position there. It was like a night manager. And then we were like, "No, we need to focus on the coffee shop," so I quit there. [*Laughs*] And then it was like all coffee all the time.

[00:11:13]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah.

[00:11:14]

Louisa Kleto: It was great.

[00:11:16]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Wow. So then why—I mean, you had been working for how long at Dilworth Coffee Shop?

[00:11:22]

Jimmy Kleto: I was at Dilworth, jeez, I think total for about a year. And I had always wanted to work in a coffee shop, and when I was living in Boone, I did work at just like a family-run independent coffeehouse for like two years. I had taken a break from App [Appalachia] State and got a job at the coffee shop, and I was like, “Oh, this is so great,” and I loved it. I fell in love with the coffee community and the culture and the whole premise of, like, an independently, like, small family-run small business, and the fact of it being a coffee shop really appealed to me, and I just fell in love with it, and I just instantly knew. I was like, “This is what I need to do is open my own shop.”

And just the trail of pieces brought me back to Charlotte to the space where the coffee shop is, which is actually owned by my grandfather who I’m named after. He bought that property back in the sixties, and through the years it had just been a slew of different things, like it had been a little market, a candy shop, a leatherworking store, a guy used to make acoustic guitars there, who actually made a guitar for Doc Watson at one point there, and just like a convenience store. And then we turned it into the coffee shop. I think I’d approached my yiayia and said—because when she was alive, she was the landlord, and I approached her and I said, “Can I—?” And the previous tenant had just left, and I said, “Can I turn it into a coffee shop?”

And she said [*imitating Greek accent*], “Oh, of course, of course.” And she just was over the moon about it and didn’t want to charge me rent and ended up—

[00:13:06]

Louisa Kleto: Didn’t she charge you like \$12?

[00:13:08]

Jimmy Kleto: She charged me a dollar a month for the first year, as a gift. She was like, “One dollar a month is your rent.”

[00:13:15]

Victoria Bouloubasis: It’s nice having [*inaudible*]. [*Laughter*]

[00:13:19]

Jimmy Kleto: And it was special for the family, especially my mother’s side, because that was her father, and just to keep that within the family and the tradition of the restaurants, from the D&P to the coffee shop. And I know we’re not a full-service restaurant, but, you know, we do bake and have our own food there in house, but keeping it within that same property, that meant a lot, and it’s special to the family.

[00:13:45]

Victoria Bouloubasis: What was your yiayia’s name?

[00:13:47]

Jimmy Kleto: Katina Polizos.

[00:13:49]

Victoria Bouloubasis: And are the koulourakia, by any chance, her recipe, do you think?

[00:13:55]

Jimmy Kleto: Oh, I don't know if they're her recipe or if they're my mom's.

[00:13:58]

Louisa Kleto: They're his mom's recipe, but I don't know if she got it from her mom.

[00:14:00]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah.

[00:14:02]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Can you explain for people who don't know what koulourakia are?

[00:14:05]

Louisa Kleto: Delicious Greek butter cookies. It's a Greek butter cookie.

[00:14:10]

Jimmy Kleto: Braided.

[00:14:11]

Louisa Kleto: Braided, and some people put sesame seeds on them. We don't at the coffee shop. I think it's more of like a traditional thing to put the sesame seeds on it. It's more traditional.

[00:14:23]

Jimmy Kleto: I don't know if that's regional from Greece, like if different villages, if that's just something they do. I'm not sure.

[00:14:30]

Victoria Bouloubasis: My yiayia didn't do it either, but she was from an island, so who knows? I've seen it at festivals with sesame seeds.

[00:14:36]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, yeah.

[00:14:38]

Victoria Bouloubasis: I know at the Greek Festival, I think they do both, right?

[00:14:40]

Jimmy Kleto: I think so.

[00:14:41]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Don't they have both?

[00:14:42]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah.

[00:14:42]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Do you encourage people to dip them in the coffee?

[00:14:44]

Jimmy Kleto: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. It's funny, people will think they're like dog biscuits.

They'll say, "Oh, look at these dog biscuits."

I'm like, "No, they're cookies. They're great for dunking in your coffee."

[00:14:53]

Louisa Kleto: You're going to eat one and you're going to feel horrible, because you're going to come back and buy like twelve more, because they're so addictive.

[00:14:59]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah.

[00:15:00]

Louisa Kleto: I think the first time I had one, I think I ate like three in a row, and I got so sick, because I was like, “No, too much sugar.” It was worth it. It was totally worth it.

[00:15:10]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Sugar and butter [*inaudible*].

[00:15:12]

Louisa Kleto: Right. That’s why it’s so good. It’s the butter.

[00:15:14]

Jimmy Kleto: The foundation of good cookies.

[00:15:16]

Victoria Bouloubasis: So, yeah, talk a little bit about—you know, you’ve been there eight years now, and it’s also neat that it’s in your grandparents’ building. [*Laughs*]

[00:15:24]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah.

[00:15:25]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Tell me a little bit about that corridor of Central Avenue and what it means to you being there, growing up in Charlotte. Is there sort of [*inaudible*]?

[00:15:34]

Jimmy Kleto: Well, so, yeah, and when we were kids and over at yiayia's house for big dinners or whatever, we'd go out in the front yard and play, but we were never allowed to go far, because back then it was kind of a rough neighborhood, you know. And it was getting better, especially in 2008, when we started planning the coffee shop and doing the plans and the architecture and all that stuff, and the neighborhood was really turning around. It was turning into like a real hip, artsy area, full of quirky businesses and small businesses and stuff like that, and it was just so cool to be a part of that kind of change for the whole neighborhood.

And I remember my Uncle Andy, my mom's youngest brother, since they all grew up in that area, I remember him telling me once that where our shop is and about a mile down the road into like the bulk of like [*inaudible*], were like all lot of more of the businesses so far, he said that they used to call that stretch the Miracle Mile. And I've really only rarely heard of that, and it was so cool to hear him say that. It's like that's really interesting, you know, to think like back in the sixties and seventies when they were in their twenties and stuff, you know, that to have a place like the Miracle Mile that was full of like small businesses and stuff like that was really cool. And I don't know, just to be part of that area and to kind of see the kind of revival of that area now, because it's really starting to fill in with, of course, apartment buildings, but there are a lot of new businesses and stuff that are going in, and it's really cool to see kind of the change. And it's been a slow process for that neighborhood, I mean, to be honest. I mean, we talked to a lot of people will tell you that area wasn't the best but it's—

[00:17:36]

Louisa Kleto: Even like a couple years ago it was kind of—I mean, it was just like a couple restaurants and like—

[00:17:41]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, I mean, there's some iffy parts and stuff, but it's really turning around. It's really turned into such a great community-driven area.

[00:17:47]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Has it always been immigrant sort of focused? Because, I mean, if you go toward Sharon Amity, you see everything. You can eat anything you want.

[Laughs]

[00:18:00]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, you'll go through like a little Vietnamese pocket, and then there's the dim sum and the Hispanic, yeah. I think it always has, yeah. I mean, there's a few areas in Charlotte that have always been very kind of, I guess, immigrant-focused like that, you know. Central Avenue, parts of South Boulevard, but definitely down Central it seems like the further down you go, you'll hit like different pockets of different cultures, which is really, really cool.

[00:18:30]

Louisa Kleto: Especially when we're hungry and we don't know what to eat.

[*Laughter*] "Let's just go for a ride."

[00:18:35]

Victoria Bouloubasis: And then can you clarify where your grandmother lived in relation to the coffee shop?

[00:18:40]

Jimmy Kleto: Two blocks away.

[00:18:43]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Do you mind saying that in a full sentence? [*Laughter*]

[00:18:47]

Jimmy Kleto: My grandparents, their house that they bought when they came from Greece was two blocks away from where our coffee shop is now.

[00:18:55]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Is it still there, the same house?

[00:18:58]

Jimmy Kleto: Yes.

[00:18:59]

Louisa Kleto: Kind of.

[00:19:00]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah. We were living in there. We were living in the house, but we knew we were going to start a family soon, and the house was very old, very outdated. I mean, the—

[00:19:09]

Louisa Kleto: Push buttons.

[00:19:10]

Jimmy Kleto: Push-button light switches. It would have needed a lot of work. It didn't have central air, heat. And so we were like, "Well, we need a house. This isn't a great place for a baby." Plus, the family was gracious enough to let us live in it, but it was still a lot of my grandmother's stuff in there, and so we moved out.

[00:19:30]

Louisa Kleto: I found your mom's old magazine with her wedding dress in it. I found it, and she goes, "That's the one with my wedding dress in it."

And I go, "Oh, there's a stack of these up in the attic." Fire hazard. Really cool fire hazard, but it was a total fire hazard.

[00:19:43]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah. And so when we moved out and the family was deciding to—it was a very hard decision for them, for my mom, her sister, and two brothers, the four kids, to sell the house. They sold it, and the person who bought it renovated, added square footage, and we went in and took a tour after it was done. It looks amazing, and we were instantaneously like, “Oh, I want to live here.” But now, because I have to drive by it, we drive by it every day, and so we see it.

[00:20:16]

Louisa Kleto: This is the house when we were living there. My sister painted this room, a photo, and it looks very different. It used to just have a very small porch. It was, what, like three bedrooms and a den in the back. And they basically just opened up a whole bunch of—it’s beautiful inside. They let us walk through, because it was such a big thing for, like, Jimmy’s mom, Stanley, and everything. But it looks completely different. This was like—it was a great house, and it was so old and it had so much character, and it’s so different now. And that’s the sad part about like some of the stuff that’s going on in that neighborhood, too, is that they’re changing things, for the better, granted. This was a—

[00:21:04]

Jimmy Kleto: A lot of the history is getting forgotten.

[00:21:08]

Louisa Kleto: Hard. But, yeah. But it's just changing so much that, like, this whole thing just looks—like if you drive by, it's on Hawthorne, it doesn't look anything like it anymore.

[00:21:18]

Jimmy Kleto: I mean, my mother still cries about it, the fact that the house isn't in the family anymore.

[00:21:21]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Is your mom making the—that was a rumor I heard, that she was making, like, the baked goods. But it sounds like you guys are making them.

[00:21:30]

Jimmy Kleto: She was. When we first—

[00:21:34]

Louisa Kleto: She was the original baker.

[00:21:35]

Jimmy Kleto: Yes. She's the OG baker. When we first opened, and this is before Louisa was down here, it was myself and my mother and father, and my mother would be

in the kitchen every morning, baking muffins and scones, and we did quiche and some koulourakia, and we did paximadia, which ended up being like giant, you know—

[00:21:57]

Louisa Kleto: They're huge.

[00:21:57]

Jimmy Kleto: The traditional paximadia that you see are like three, four inches. These were like seven inches long. But she would do all those. Then over the years, she'd had like two knee surgeries, I think, and with both my parents close to seventy now, we didn't see fit to—I didn't want to have Mom standing in a hot kitchen for eight hours.

[00:22:18]

Louisa Kleto: They are, quote, unquote, “retired,” which means—

[00:22:21]

Jimmy Kleto: Yes, and they still help out [*inaudible*].

[00:22:22]

Louisa Kleto: —not at all, yeah. [*inaudible*]

[00:22:23]

Jimmy Kleto: They still help out when we're in a pinch and when we need someone to pick up a kitchen shift and especially as the coffee shop had gotten a lot busier and demanded a lot more of baked goods and kitchen focus—

[00:22:38]

Louisa Kleto: We had to start training more and more people to kind of take it over, because it was just too much for, like, Olga or Jimmy to go in and bake every single thing. We had to have other people, which is a good thing, because it meant that the shop was growing, but it was just—like we had to start training people and stuff, and it's really hard to train because Olga's recipes were sometimes like, "You take a pinch of this," and like—

[00:23:03]

Jimmy Kleto: And they were all just in her head.

[00:23:04]

Louisa Kleto: —and like, "About a cup, about a cup, maybe a cup and a half."

And I'd be like, "How about this? You just write some stuff down for me and then we'll put it in our recipe binder."

And she goes, "Oh, okay." And that's how we made it.

[00:23:15]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, that was—we had to pull all the recipes out of her head and get them onto paper and into an official notebook in the kitchen for a recipe book, and that was fun, but she’s like, “Oh, just throw a little of this in there, some of that.”

[00:23:28]

Louisa Kleto: I still have no idea how to make baklava because she won’t give me measurements.

[00:23:32]

Jimmy Kleto: I still don’t know.

[00:23:33]

Louisa Kleto: There’s no measurements.

[00:23:34]

Jimmy Kleto: That’s her—she still does all the baklava, and actually she’s grown and evolved to where the baklava is now a vegan baklava. So instead of honey, she uses simple syrup.

[00:23:49]

Louisa Kleto: And it still tastes just the same.

[00:23:51]

Jimmy Kleto: And it's out of this world. It's out of this world.

[00:23:53]

Louisa Kleto: And oil instead of butter?

[00:23:55]

Jimmy Kleto: Yes, oil, olive oil instead of butter. And especially in the neighborhood, [unclear], which is so very, like, vegan and vegetarian-focused and friendly that everybody gets a kick out of that when they see it. Because you would think Baklava, you know, butter and honey and all this stuff, and then they see a vegan version, they're like, "Whoa. Let me get some of that." And so that's been a real big hit, and that's a change over just the last couple of months where she's done it vegan. She's like, "Do you want me to always do a vegan?"

I'm like, "Yes." [*Laughs*]

[00:24:24]

Louisa Kleto: If it tastes the same, why not? You know, like, granted we did just talk about how important butter was. [*Laughter*] If you don't *need* it, I guess, it's inclusive for everybody that way.

[00:24:33]

Victoria Bouloubasis: A balance. So tell me a little bit about—because hearing you talk about the coffee community and why you like it so much and, you know, coffee shops represent something in neighborhoods, and I want to know from you what you think your role is as a coffee shop owner, what sort of community it’s creating on that corner.

[00:24:56]

Jimmy Kleto: Well, Louisa and I, we always wanted our coffee shop to be—I don’t want to say the focal point of the neighborhood, but we wanted to be a place where the neighbors come and hang out, you know. We always strived and focused on putting out quality cups of coffee, and we see it every morning with the line of people, and neighbors come in and like, “Oh, fancy seeing you here,” blah, blah, blah, and, you know, kids are running around. I think I had a little girl a couple years ago who was calling me Uncle Jimmy, and she was just a little girl in the neighborhood.

[00:25:30]

Louisa Kleto: Yeah, she’s so cute.

[00:25:32]

Jimmy Kleto: But with our family, and Louisa has a big, close family, you know, it’s that kind of closeness is really important to us, and that was something that we instantly wanted to kind of convey through the coffee shop.

[00:25:52]

Louisa Kleto: I think a lot of it was, too, we wanted to make sure it was someplace that, like, you can walk in and not be, like, there to meet anybody, but you walk in and you see all the other regulars, and you're like, "Oh, hey, Bob, like, I didn't know you'd be here today. How are you?" and then just, like, sit down and have a whole conversation when you're actually there to get work done, but you get sidetracked because you're so invested in the other people that are there.

[00:26:16]

Jimmy Kleto: My dad has always said that we're the Cheers of coffee shops, because we end up learning everybody by their names, and so people come in, like, "Hey, Raquel," Michelle, Bob, whatever, and it's true. And something like that, just as simple as talking to somebody, a customer by their name, goes so far—

[00:26:34]

Louisa Kleto: It really does.

[00:26:35]

Jimmy Kleto: —in such a tight-knit community, neighborhood that we're in, you know, it's just perfect, you know, and it's exactly what we wanted.

[00:26:42]

Louisa Kleto: Also I think it like gives everybody that comes in, like, a little special feeling when they're like, "Oh, like, this is my place too." It's not just our place; it's not just our employees' place. It's, you know, we want them to come in, and that's what we're also trying to get done at the second shop. It's just like be able to have people feel like "This is my second home, like, this is where I come to, like, relax or where I'm comfortable, or when I'm bored, what do I do? I'm going to go to the coffee shop and, like, read or something like that." Like, it's very much like come here and be yourself, you know.

[00:27:22]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Can you tell me a little bit about the menu, like what some popular things are?

[00:27:27]

Louisa Kleto: Koulourakia. [*Laughter*]

[00:27:30]

Jimmy Kleto: Definitely the pastries, of course, yeah, and quiche. In fact, everything, because we bake everything fresh every morning, and that really is an enticement to walk into a place and you smell everything cooking right away. As far as the coffee goes, we're so fortunate to have an outstanding coffee roaster that we partner with in Joe Van Gogh. They're out of Hillsborough, North Carolina, and I believe we're the only ones in

Charlotte who carry their coffee. There might be one other place. I'm not 100 percent sure. But they were similar to us, just a small business run, and they've been roasting coffee there for twenty years in the Triangle Area, and they put out phenomenal coffees. And we're so, so pleased to work with them on a daily basis and—

[00:28:23]

Louisa Kleto: And they're also very like—like I guess they have a very open, inclusive kind of business model as well. Like, they're not kind of like take over the world with their beans or whatever, you know, but they have their own shops in, like, Raleigh and Durham, I think, and you can buy their coffee up there. But they're always—whenever Tracy, who works there, is in town, she always comes in and says hi, like, she always makes sure she comes to see us, and they're just so nice. We can just go in and be like, “Hey, guys,” and they're like, “Oh, hey, like, let me show you this new thing we have,” like all this other stuff. They're just—they're wonderful people.

[00:29:01]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, great company to work with. And so, you know, having quality coffee really goes a long way, and so that extends into when I think our kind of most popular drink is the Shorty, the Central Shorty, which was a drink that I kind of had messed around and was making—

[00:29:22]

Louisa Kleto: I think it's just what you were drinking.

[00:29:24]

Jimmy Kleto: It was what I always drank at the end of my shift or whatever, and it ended up being just like a little six-ounce latte with, like, a little splash of vanilla. And we make a lot of our syrups in house, and so people come in, “Hey, we need a Shorty,” and that’s what everyone calls our kid, you know, six-month-old.

[00:29:41]

Louisa Kleto: Central Shorty.

[00:29:41]

Jimmy Kleto: He’s the Central Shorty. He has his own Instagram account. [*Laughs*]

[00:29:43]

Victoria Bouloubasis: That’s adorable.

[00:29:45]

Louisa Kleto: I say that because I run it. So [*inaudible*].

[00:29:51]

Jimmy Kleto: So just running the gamut of traditional espresso drinks, you know, but if somebody—but we’re confident in our product and our ability to put out such a good cup of coffee, that if somebody wants a twenty-ounce latte, we’ll make it for you, and it’s going to be good.

[00:30:09]

Louisa Kleto: It will taste just like an eight-ounce latte, like it'll have that, like, deep espresso taste where you get all those coffee notes, but, I don't know, why would you deny something to somebody when it's so easy to make? But we'll make it good. We just want to make sure that it's quality. It's not watering down anything or anything like that.

[00:30:32]

Victoria Bouloubasis: I had a Shorty today, too, because Keia told me to get it.

[*Laughter*] But you don't feel like a pretentious coffee shop.

[00:30:41]

Jimmy Kleto: No, and we've never wanted to be. It's real easy in the coffee world to have that kind of level of pretentiousness. Coffee has really kind of evolved to, like, wine, just like tastings and, like, defining different flavor notes and stuff like that.

[00:31:04]

Louisa Kleto: The pH level in the water [*inaudible*].

[00:31:06]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, exactly, exactly. And, you know, it's real easy, and I've seen coffee shops from all over the country that we visited that, you know, they can exude a

level of pretentiousness, but that was something we never wanted to do. We wanted to keep it homey and kind of keep ourselves grounded.

[00:31:25]

Louisa Kleto: And find that balance between quality and efficiency.

[00:31:28]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah.

[00:31:35]

Victoria Bouloubasis: Well, I do have another question too.

[00:31:38]

Jimmy Kleto: Okay.

[00:31:39]

Victoria Bouloubasis: So we're at your house, and you just showed me the coffee bar setup. Do you guys get really geeky every morning, or how do you drink coffee

[inaudible]?

[00:31:45]

Jimmy Kleto: Sometimes. If we have time, or if, like, I'm not working, I'll maybe do a pour-over or something, or if we're going to do a French press.

[00:31:55]

Louisa Kleto: We do have, like, our favorite roasters, and, like, we went to a coffee convention in Chicago and we, like, fell in love with Dark Matter Coffee, which is out of Chicago. So we have like our special bag that we make a French press or a pour-over with when we have the time. But I basically just make like a giant pot of coffee every morning.

[00:32:19]

Jimmy Kleto: Especially with the baby now, it's—especially with the baby, it's real easy just to make an eight-cup pot of coffee and chug it. *[Laughs]*

[00:32:35]

Louisa Kleto: Eight? I purposely bought a bigger—

[00:32:38]

Jimmy Kleto: One for you, one for me.

[00:32:39]

Louisa Kleto: I purposely bought a bigger coffee pot because I was like we're going to have the baby, and everybody and their mother is going to be down here all the time, and my family drinks a lot of coffee. But now I kind of just use it for myself, I guess, most of the time.

[00:32:55]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah.

[00:32:56]

Louisa Kleto: It's really sad.

[00:32:57]

Victoria Bouloubasis: I don't have anything else, but what would you like to add about, you know, having this, like, it's not a new business, it's eight years old, but it feels new compared to what else is happening and how it feels like part of the growth of Central Avenue. So is there anything else you want to add about that?

[00:33:14]

Jimmy Kleto: I mean, we're just excited to be part of all of that, you know, and it's—

[00:33:20]

Louisa Kleto: And very proud [*inaudible*].

[00:33:21]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, very, very proud.

[00:33:22]

Louisa Kleto: One of the—I guess, like, when you opened, it was just starting, and, I mean, I told you this last night. We talked about this. But for us, like, I’m very proud of Jimmy, because he wanted to open his own shop and he did it, and we both have been working in coffee for like twelve, thirteen years. And I always wanted to open a coffee shop, but I don’t really think I had, like, the guts to do it, like actually like buckle down and do it. But he did it, and it turned out to be just this really awesome place that we love our customers, we love our neighborhood, and, I’m sorry, you did a great job. [*Laughter*]

[00:34:06]

Jimmy Kleto: Thank you.

[00:34:07]

Louisa Kleto: Good job, Kleto. [*Laughter*]

[00:34:09]

Jimmy Kleto: But just like she said, we’re very proud to be part of the neighborhood and to be in such a really cool neighborhood like [*inaudible*] is the hot place where everyone wants to go to on the weekends, where people want to move and live, and like there’s all the cool funky restaurants and ten breweries like within a two-mile radius, which is awesome. But it’s just being part of that whole culture and just we couldn’t—

[00:34:36]

Louisa Kleto: And the people.

[00:34:40]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, yeah. We just couldn't be happier.

[00:34:40]

Louisa Kleto: It's fun. I like [unclear]. [unclear] is fun. Everybody's just a little like funky enough that it's a great place. Nobody's super weird. Nobody's not weird. They're just the right amount of kooky.

[00:34:56]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

[00:34:58]

Louisa Kleto: And our staff fit right in.

[00:35:00]

Jimmy Kleto: Yeah, that's true.

[00:35:00]

Louisa Kleto: And Jimmy and I fit right in.

[00:35:00]

Jimmy Kleto: Absolutely.

[00:35:02]

Victoria Bouloubasis: That's awesome. Well, thank you guys so much.

[00:35:04]

Jimmy Kleto: You're welcome. Thank you.

[End of interview]